

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-10 ISO-00 ITF-05 SR-02 ORM-01 EA-06

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FM AMCONSUL BELIZE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4056

USMISSION GENEVA IMMEDIATE

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY KINGSTON

AMEMBASSY MEXICO

C O N F I D E N T I A L BELIZE 270

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: AEMG

SUBJECT: RESETTLEMENT OF VIETNAMESE REFUGEES

REF: (A) STATE 097854

(B) STATE 104157 (NOTAL)

GUATEMALA FOR AGATT

1. SUMMARY. INITIAL REACTION TO INQUIRY RE WILLINGNESS TO ADMIT SVN REFUGEES WAS FAVORABLE. BELIZE'S NEED FOR MORE PEOPLE, PLUS SUBSTANTIAL UNTAPPED AGRICULTURAL POTENTIAL MAKE COUNTRY LOGICAL CANDIDATE FOR REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT; HOWEVER, EXCEPT FOR POSSIBLE GOB CONTRIBUTION OF LAND, REQUIRED RESOURCES, MAINLY FUNDS, WOULD HAVE TO BE PROVIDED ENTIRELY FROM EXTERNAL SOURCES, AS WOULD EXPERTISE IN PLANNING AND ADMINISTRATION OF ANY SUBSTANTIAL RESETTLEMENT EFFORT. END SUMMARY.

2. CONTENTS REFTELS DISCUSSED WITH MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS C.L.B.

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ROGERS, AT PRESENT ACTING PREMIER IN ABSENCE OF PREMIER PRICE WHO

IS NOT EXPECTED BACK IN BELIZE BEFORE MAY 15.

3. ROGERS' INITIAL REACTION SEEMED FAVORABLE. PREFACING HIS REMARKS WITH COMMENT THAT HE BELIEVED HE COULD SPEAK FOR THE GOB IN RESPONDING TO MY INQUIRY, HE SAID PRICE GOVERNMENT WAS AWARE OF COUNTRY'S NEED TO INCREASE PRESENT SPARSE POPULATION AND WAS ACTIVELY CONSIDERING WAYS IN WHICH THIS MIGHT BE ACCOMPLISHED. HE CITED AS AN EXAMPLE A PILOT PROJECT NOW IN PLANNING STAGE INVOLVING FIFTEEN JAMAICAN FAMILIES AND FIFTEEN BELIZEAN FAMILIES TO BEGIN AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF BELIZE RIVER VALLEY.

4. ROGERS SAID GOB WAS NOT TOO HAPPY WITH RESULT OF MENNONITE RESETTLEMENT IN BELIZE BECAUSE, ALTHOUGH QUALITY OF MENNONITE'S AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION WAS EXCELLENT, BELIZEANS HAD LEARNED NOTHING FROM THEM OWING TO THEIR INSULARITY, AND CONSEQUENTLY PREVIOUS BLANKET AGREEMENT TO ADMIT MENNONITE GROUPS WAS BEING REVOKED. COMMENT: IN MY OPINION THIS IS A HARSH JUDGMENT IN VIEW OF IMPORTANT QUALITATIVE CONTRIBUTION MENNONITE'S HAVE MADE TO THIS COUNTRY'S AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION. HOWEVER, GOB'S DISSATISFACTION WITH MENNONITES IS WORTH NOTING IN CONTEXT OF PLANNING ANY SVN RESETTLEMENT HERE AS AN ILLUSTRATION OF ONE PITFALL ANY SUCH EFFORT SHOULD SEEK TO AVOID.

5. BEFORE GIVING SERIOUS CONSIDERATION TO POSSIBLE ADMISSION OF SOUTH VIETNAMESE REFUGEES, HOWEVER, ROGERS SAID GOB WOULD HAVE TO HAVE A MORE SPECIFIC PROPOSAL, ESPECIALLY IN REGARD TO FUNDING AVAILABLE FOR RESETTLEMENT OF THESE REFUGEES. HE POINTED OUT THAT THERE WOULD BE COSTS INVOLVED IN TRANSPORTING REFUGEES TO BELIZE, IN PROVIDING THEM WITH HOUSING AND, IN THE CASE OF PROSPECTIVE AGRICULTURAL SETTLERS, IN PROVIDING VARIOUS INFRASTRUCTURE FACILITIES -- ACCESS ROADS, LAND CLEARANCE, ELECTRICITY -- AS WELL AS MONEY TO LIVE ON PRIOR TO THEIR BECOMING SELF-SUPPORTING.

6. IN REPLY TO MY QUESTION AS TO WHETHER GOB WOULD BE IN A POSITION TO CONTRIBUTE LAND, HE UNHESITATINGLY REPLIED YES.

7. IN A MORE SPECULATIVE VEIN, ROGERS THOUGHT SOUTH VIETNAMESE REFUGEES MIGHT BE UTILIZED IN DEVELOPMENT OF POTENTIAL RICE PRODUCING AREAS IN SOUTHERN BELIZE, IN THE PRODUCTION OF SOY BEANS AND FEED GRAINS AND IN POULTRY PRODUCTION, ADDING THAT HE WOULD

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NOT RULE OUT POSSIBLE UTILIZATION OF SOME SKILLED CRAFTSMEN AND A FEW PROFESSIONALS ALTHOUGH BOTH LATTER CATEGORIES WOULD NEED TO BE ABLE TO SPEAK ENGLISH.

8. COMMENT. BELIZE IS A COUNTRY ABOUT THE SIZE OF THE STATE OF MASSACHUSETTS WITH A POPULATION OF ONLY ABOUT 140,000. THE VIRTUALLY UNANIMOUS OPINION OF SEVERAL QUALIFIED OBSERVERS WITH WHOM I HAVE DISCUSSED THE COUNTRY'S AGRICULTURAL POTENTIAL SINCE MY

ARRIVAL IN FEBRUARY 1974 IS THAT BELIZE HAS SUFFICIENT UNDEVELOPED NATURAL RESOURCES IN LAND AND WATER TO SUPPORT A MUCH LARGER AGRICULTURAL POPULATION THAN IT NOW HAS. FURTHERMORE, ALTHOUGH UNEMPLOYMENT IS MODERATELY HIGH STATISTICALLY, THE COUNTRY REGULARLY ADMITS AGRICULTURAL WORKERS FROM MEXICO AND OTHER NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES IN SURPRISINGLY LARGE NUMBERS, ESPECIALLY SUGAR CANE AND CITRUS INDUSTRIES, BECAUSE SO MANY UNEMPLOYED BELIZEANS DISLIKE HARD WORK.

9. FURTHER COMMENT. ON THE NEGATIVE SIDE IS THE UNREMITTING INEPTITUDE OF THE GOB BUREAUCRACY, NOT TO MENTION THE VENALITY OF SOME SENIOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS WHO WOULD DOUBTLESS VIEW A RESETTLEMENT EFFORT WITH AN EYE TO IDENTIFYING ANY OPPORTUNITIES IT MIGHT AFFORD FOR GRAFT. ROGERS' ASSERTION THAT GOB WOULD BE WILLING TO CONTRIBUTE LAND MIGHT PROVE TO BE ACCURATE SINCE POTENTIALLY ARABLE LAND IS INDEED ABUNDANT HERE, BUT WE WOULD WANT TO BE CERTAIN LANDS OFFERED WERE SUITABLE FOR THEIR INTENDED PURPOSE. WITH POSSIBLE EXCEPTION OF LAND, HOWEVER, I FEEL SAFE IN PREDICTING GOB CONTRIBUTION TO ANY SVN RESETTLEMENT EFFORT WOULD BE NIL.

10. RECOMMENDATION. IF ROGERS' INITIALLY FAVORABLE ATTITUDE DOES IN FACT TURN OUT TO BE THAT OF THE GOB, BELIZE SHOULD BE ABLE TO RESETTLE ONE HUNDRED OR MORE REFUGEES PROVIDED FUNDS WERE AVAILABLE TO DEFRAY COSTS. HOWEVER, INITIATIVE FOR SETTING UP AND ADMINISTERING A PROGRAM WOULD HAVE TO COME FROM OUTSIDE BELIZE. IF ABOVE DESCRIBED SITUATION HOLDS ANY INTEREST FOR DEPARTMENT OR INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES, I WOULD SUGGEST THAT A QUALIFIED REPRESENTATIVE OF ONE OF THE LATTER VISIT BELIZE TO DISCUSS SPECIFICS, NATURALLY, SUCH A VISIT SHOULD FIRST BE CLEARED WITH GOB. GAWF

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